



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 82 Feb 1997

COMING EVENTS

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA -- Sunday March 2, 1997, is Clean Up day and STEP will again be manning a site at the corner of Kissing Point Rd and Vernon St., South Turrumurra. Your help will be appreciated.

AUTUMN BUSHWALK -- Without wanting to be morbid, defeatist or negative, we thought it might interest people to see at first hand, and have it described by locals, the effects of a motorway (the M2) on the Lane Cove Valley bushland. John Vonwiller's photos tell the story eloquently, but a close up view is overwhelming.

We are therefore planning a bushwalk through the Devlin's Creek area of Beecroft Park, in April on a day to be advised in the next Newsletter.

MAURITANIA -- She was a grand old ship in her time, or a rustbucket later, but John Martyn will not talk about the ship, but about his visit to Mauritania, in West Africa. And since we have to allow him to make the visit first, his talk will be in April, on a day and at a time and venue to be advised in the next Newsletter.

Christmas BBQ

It all seems so long ago now, but last year's BBQ was a great success. Harry and Neroli Lock provided the gas BBQ at the back of Leuna Ave., and about 30 people enjoyed the late afternoon get together. The weather was good and the surroundings are very attractive, and all those present had a good chance to renew contact and exchange news and views.

Membership Drive

The publication of the Field Guide has given STEP a couple of years of increased public profile, and your committee would like to see that translated into additional membership.

Increased membership allows us to spread the conservation message further and allows better communication between like minded people. We are therefore planning to canvas for membership through a letter box campaign. To do that effectively, we need to cover territory as completely as possible, and we need volunteers to help with the letterboxing. Sue Jones, our Membership Secretary, will coordinate the allocation of areas throughout Ku-ring-gai and beyond.

If you have time and inclination to help with letterboxing please contact Sue (9449 4718) or Bruno (9449 1985), or through the post to P.O.Box 697, Turrumurra, 2074.

More Motorways

Although this is strictly outside our membership area, we are in receipt of the latest edition (No. 5, January 1997) of "Hell on Wheels", an 8 page high quality broadsheet newspaper published with the backing and support of the NSW Nature Conservation Council, LinkUp, Action for Public Transport, Transport Action Group and other organisations, which are trying to get a more sensible transport planning approach for the metropolitan area than the RTA's "Orbital" route motorway plans. It contains a series of authoritative articles about the Eastern Distributor, the M5 East and a light rail network. It also exposes the dishonesty of the RTA in its traffic forecasts and assessments, used in order to achieve its ends.



Although it appears that the threat to the Wollie Creek wetland has been averted by the proposal to contain the M5 East in a tunnel, the so called "Orbital Route" is a traffic-generating road system detrimental to our metropolitan environment. "Hell on Wheels" is looking for financial support to continue its

publication.

To get a copy, or for other enquiries write to Hell on Wheels, PO Box 333, Bexley, 2207. Make cheques payable to NSW NCC, and post to NSW NCC Anti-Motorway Campaign, 39 George St., The Rocks, Sydney. 2000.

World Wide Web

Although STEP stands for conservation, we are quite happy to move with the times on technology, if it improves our opportunities to get our message around. Therefore committee member, Geoff Suggate, has set up a STEP site on the WWW, on his home page. It is our intention to build up the information on this site to allow access to people beyond the reach of our Newsletter. We are not trying to convert the world, but increased exposure will help to interchange information and views with other organisations and will occasionally reach a potential member or contributor.

The address is:

<http://www.ozemail.com.au/~gsuggate/stepmain.htm>.

Currently it contains details of STEP's aims and objectives, as well as information and prices of STEP's publications, ordering details and how to contact the STEP committee.

This Newsletter and subsequent

issues will also be on it, and a list of the proposed activities for 1997. Try it some time.

BUSHFIRES

The last time we touched on the topic of bushfires was in issue No. 68, September, 1994, following on from the NCC Conference on the "Environment in Crisis".

The report by the Coronial Inquiry into the disastrous January, 1994, bushfires has been published, and we have obtained a summary of its findings, containing a number of important points:

More hazard reduction is required at the residential/bushland interface to avoid the direct flame attack, which destroyed a number of houses.

There has been a consistent shortage of resources available for hazard reduction work, and the period of time for such work is very limited and subject to the vagaries of weather.

All hazard reduction work should be done by paid labour, rather than volunteers. *(We feel that volunteers should not be excluded, but that action should not depend on them)*

(We would also add, that all fire control officers in charge of such hazard reduction should be trained in ecological principles and environmental assessment)

People living at the bushland interface should help to pay for hazard reduction and fire protection measures, to overcome the resource shortage, which has so frequently prevented Councils from implementing adequate hazard reduction works during the restricted seasonal opportunities.



The "Fireguard" concept of organising neighbourhood groups to remove hazards from properties under the guidance of trained personnel.

(We would suggest that the STEP method of hand clearing should be adopted where such activity is to happen in bushland adjacent to residences)

The burning for hazard reduction should not be subject to the "Clean Air Act", provided it did not include green grass burning. We understand that the NSW Nature Conservation Council will prepare a kit of information, which is to be distributed widely as a guide to good fire protection measures.



Incorporation of Bushland into National Park

STEP has contributed a column to the last two issues of *The Ku-ring-gai Observer*, the December issue containing a call for all authorities to transfer all open space under their control, which is part of the Lane Cove Valley bushland, to the National Park, so that it can be managed as one unit.

It was subsequently pointed out to us that this article did not correctly represent all the facts. Consequently we would like to acknowledge that Ku-ring-gai Council had taken the initiative in July, 1996, to review all its holdings of bushland adjacent to National Parks with a view to incorporation into National Park. We also acknowledge that the progress of this initiative is being actively pursued, with positive response from State authorities. This represents a clear lead to other authorities to do likewise with their holdings.

Single control of all bushland in the Lane Cove Valley has been one of STEP's objectives since its inception, and we support steps taken in that direction.

Within the Ku-ring-gai area such lands include the B2/B3 corridor, which has now been abandoned.



Population

The subject of population has cropped up again through the public consultation process about the 97/98 Migration and Humanitarian Programs initiated by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Philip Ruddock MP.

STEP has previously drawn attention to the effects of population pressures on our metropolitan area, and on Ku-ring-gai in particular. We have therefore again made a submission, not so much in terms of trying to influence the 97/98 programs, but to draw attention to the overall problem of population policy.

We reproduce the substantive portion of our letter here. (It would be interesting to hear from members who may have a different view on this matter.)

The formulation of an annual immigration program can only be part of an overall Immigration Policy, which in turn should be an integral part of a Population Policy. The latter has been absent from the consideration of the annual immigration program.

Evidence has emerged, and is continuing to emerge, that the impact of our current population is unsustainable, given our current lifestyle and use of resources. The assumption that this impact can be addressed and reversed by technological change has been the basis for

ignoring the evidence in the drive for economic growth, with population increase as a vital component of economic growth.



The "techno-fix" assumption is no longer valid, and future economic growth must be derived from greater use of intellectual resources, rather than from increased use of natural resources.

We therefore suggest that Population Stabilisation is of overarching importance in the formulation of Immigration Policy, which must guide the formulation of the annual migration and humanitarian programs.

Although we are not in a position to quantify a population limit, we point to the effects of the growing population in the Sydney metropolitan area:

Typical problems of pollution, transport gridlock, and degradation of surrounding natural bushland are very evident.

The drive towards urban consolidation and its accompanying degradation of suburban amenity is a response by the State Government to the population pressures resulting from immigration.

On the other hand further development at the fringes of the metropolitan area for residential purposes would have detrimental effect on existing agricultural land

and surrounding bushland.

By whichever means additional population is to be housed in the Sydney coastal basin, additional waste generation, pollution, as well as permanent alienation of natural resources will result.

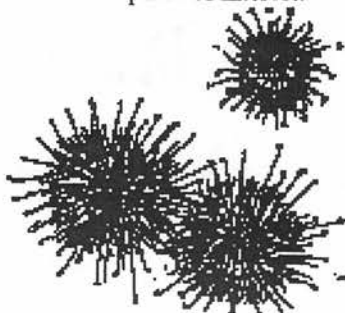
Whereas there is a strong argument for a humanitarian migration program, there is also a strong argument for preserving the environment for future generations, rather than allowing its despoliation and destruction by excessive population now.

All indications are that the current de facto population policy, which is the result of yearly ad hoc decisions on immigration, no longer serves the best interests of our nation, and that a comprehensive Population Stabilisation Policy is needed, which in turn should be used to determine annual programs.

Since this can not be achieved in one electoral term, it should be commenced urgently to prevent it becoming not only an intractable political problem, but also a disaster for our natural environment.

We therefore urge you to move quickly towards establishing such a Population Stabilisation Policy.

The potential effect on our immediate environment of population pressures is so evident that we make no apologies for entering a debate, which could be seen to be outside our sphere of interest.



Local Action

Every now and again something happens, which makes you feel good.

And so it was with committee member Ron Seymour, who found two areas of bushland on his frequent walks, which had been degraded by the action of thoughtless high school students over a period of time.

He decided to do something about it, and contacted staff at the high school. Although it happened to be the examination and pre-Christmas period, he obtained their cooperation, and now reports that students, under staff supervision, effected removal of the rubbish and a general clean up of the two areas. Ron has congratulated those involved and hopes that the added attention will prevent irresponsible acts in future.



Native Grasslands

It is difficult to know what the pre-European temperate grasslands were really like since the early descriptions were very superficial, and the introduction of hard-hooved animals soon changed them irrevocably. Today our only clues are the remnants of native grassland left relatively undisturbed in isolated cemeteries, railway clearings and unused road verges. Cemeteries in particular have provided excellent refuges for many remnant species of the original grasslands. Old cemeteries are not only fascinating for their headstones, but for their flora.

BOOK REVIEW -- The Decline of the Age of Oil -- *Petrol Politics: Australia's Road Ahead*

On first looking at the title, one could suspect that it is another doomsday view, many of which have not come to pass because of unforeseeable factors (not that we should complain about the sky not actually falling in), but on delving into it you soon get the feeling that the author, Brian J. Fleay, has done his research thoroughly and knows his subject. Fleay, a respected engineer, recently retired from a senior position in the WA Water Authority, and currently an associate of Murdoch University's Institute of Science and Technology, explains the relationships between energy and economics and the current knowledge of oil discovery, production and consumption worldwide. He then reviews the past and present instability in oil politics (OPEC Oil shocks, Gulf war, etc), examines alternative energy sources, the balance of oil use in agriculture and transport, and leads us to the realisation that food production will take precedence over transport in future allocation of scarcer oil supplies. This will obviously have a profound impact on future transport modes in cities. Fleay looks at the impact on Australia and the options available here. Among other things he suggests that instead of our current policy of exporting natural gas we should start to reserve this for transport use in Australia, since gas production is forecast to peak and decline some fifty years after oil production declines. With reference to current transport planning he observes: ".....governments, mainstream economists, business, transport and urban planners.....are driving into the future from the view in their rear-vision mirror". The book, a Pluto Press paperback, retails for \$14.95. ISBN 186403 021 6.

Sender: STEP Inc.
P.O.Box 697,
Turrumurra, 2074.

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PHIL HELMORE & HELEN WORTHAM
19 VERNON ST
TURRAMURRA 2074

CLEANUP DAY

Sunday March 2

STEP will be manning a site at the corner of
KISSING POINT ROAD and VERNON STREET,
South Turrumurra.

This will be a central collecting point for rubbish from sites in nearby bushland. Turn up from about 8.30 a.m. and register, and we will provide a sketch map of locations. Alternatively you may like to register, then clean up a patch that you know and bring your rubbish to us. **ESSENTIAL** garden gloves, strong shoes, hat and sunscreen!

More info John Martyn 9488 8339, Jennifer Schwarz 9144 2106